

THE YOUTH ECONOMY DECODED



→ IRELAND'S NEXT ECONOMY IS ALREADY HERE.

Ireland's 630,000 young people¹ aren't waiting to participate in the economy – they're already reshaping it through how they **learn, earn and spend.**

The **Youth Economy Decoded** reveals a generation building a new financial playbook in response to a world that's more complex, digital and uncertain than the one previous generations entered. While traditional milestones like home ownership feel further away, young people are creating their own financial ecosystems through entrepreneurship, multiple income streams, fintech, investing and values-led spending.

→ SIX THINGS YOU NEED TO KNOW

1. Young people are building their own financial ecosystems.

The era of one bank account and one career is over. **73% of 16–24-year-olds use multiple financial providers, while 34% have two or more income sources.**² Young people are combining banks, fintech, freelance work, creator income, online selling and side hustles to build personalised financial lives.

2. Financial confidence and financial resilience go hand in hand.

Young people who feel most confident with money are far more likely to have habits that build financial resilience.³ Young people with the highest financial confidence are nearly **three times more likely to save regularly and more than five times as likely to invest** than those with the lowest confidence.⁴ Building financial capability is as much about confidence as it is about knowledge.

3. Financial education has moved beyond the classroom.

Almost **half (48%)** of young people learn about money primarily through informal channels such as TikTok, YouTube, Reddit and AI,⁵ while parents remain their most trusted source of financial advice.⁶ Financial literacy today increasingly includes AI literacy, media literacy and knowing who – and what – to trust.

4. Entrepreneurship is mainstream – but access is a key challenge.

68% have entrepreneurial intent, whether they're already running a business or side hustle, planning one, or wanting to start one but feeling it's out of reach.⁷ This generation is short on access, not ambition. Networks, capital and practical support remain the biggest barriers, particularly for young women.⁸

5. Spending is driven by experiences and values.

Young people are spending to live as well as save – prioritising food and drink, nights out, festivals, taxis and travel, while making their money go further through the circular economy. **88% have taken a values-based spending action in the past year,** with platforms like Vinted and Depop becoming mainstream ways to both buy and sell second-hand. Sustainability, affordability and personal identity are increasingly shaping how this generation spends.⁹

6. Young people are optimistic about themselves – but much less certain about building a future in Ireland.

68% feel hopeful about their own financial future, but only 42% believe Ireland offers a good financial future for people like them.¹⁰ At the same time, **only 38% are prioritising home ownership in the next decade.**¹¹

→ KEY TAKEAWAY

The Youth Economy is a new economic force. It's the combined learning power, earning power and spending power of a generation already reshaping Ireland's future workforce, businesses and consumer markets.

The opportunity is to build the most financially confident generation Ireland has ever had – giving young people the capability, confidence and support to turn ambition into long-term financial resilience.

¹CSO, Population Estimates (Persons in April), 2026.

^{2,3,4,5,7,8,9,10,11} AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

⁶AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive

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YOUTH MANIFESTO

“As young people in Ireland, we know how to adapt.

We’re finding different ways to learn and work, to earn and invest – often because we’ve had to, and increasingly because we’ve realised we can.

We’re learning new skills, creating new sources of income, making our money work harder and spending with purpose. We’re starting businesses from our bedrooms, building careers across borders, investing earlier, sharing knowledge with each other and finding new routes towards the lives we want.

At the same time, owning our own home feels out of reach for many of us and we’re also navigating rising costs, market volatility, digital distraction and big decisions about our future. We’re figuring out how to build financial security while the world around us keeps changing.

The **Youth Economy** is the story of how we’re making it work. It’s the learning, earning and spending power of young people in Ireland today, and the potential that power holds for tomorrow.

We have an unprecedented influence on what comes next. With the right confidence, knowledge and support, we can turn that influence into progress – for ourselves, for each other, and for the Ireland we’re building.

Because when we prosper, everyone does.”

— Alex, 24
Youth Economy Research Participant



YOUTH ECONOMY DECODED

THE YOUTH ECONOMY

Foreword: THE YOUTH ECONOMY DECODED



Megan Nolan Walsh
→Textile Designer



Young people in Ireland are coming of age in a rapidly changing economy.

The paths our parents and grandparents took to build financial security are evolving. Work looks different. Technology has changed how we learn, earn and spend. The cost of getting started in adulthood has risen, while new opportunities have emerged alongside new pressures.

Against that backdrop, young people are making progress in ways that deserve closer attention.

They’re finding new ways to build careers and income. They’re developing financial knowledge through peers, digital communities and experience. They’re adapting to changing circumstances and finding resourceful ways to keep moving toward the lives they’re after.

At AIB, we believe understanding those changes matters.

“AIB is committed to empowering all people to build a sustainable future. We recognise the unprecedented challenges and opportunities young people face today, which require renewed focus and meaningful support. This report gives us a clear sense of what young people need and informs AIB’s ambitious plans to support the next generation over a number of years.”

— Orlaith Ryan
AIB Chief Customer Officer

We’re leading an initiative to explore the realities, behaviours and ambitions shaping young people’s financial lives today so that we can build our future services, products and support in direct response to those needs.

The ‘Youth Economy’ captures the interconnected power of young people to learn, earn and spend – and the role that financial confidence and support can play in strengthening that power. We’re working to make the Youth Economy easier to understand, harder to overlook and more influential in the decisions that shape Ireland’s future.

This report is an important starting point.

AIB is dedicated to becoming a better advocate for young people and a better innovator on their behalf. That means listening carefully, understanding what is changing and using our influence to help create the conditions in which young people can make progress.



THE YOUTH Economy Has ARRIVED



Layney Whelan
→Artist

Today’s young people are building their futures in an economy that runs by different rules from the one previous generations entered. Technology is reshaping work, income comes through new channels and the route to financial independence is less certain.

Ireland’s Youth Economy is taking shape in their response: building businesses, embracing new tools and finding their own ways to learn, earn and spend. Backing their ambition, skills and confidence is an investment not only in their futures, but in Ireland’s long-term competitiveness and prosperity.

→ **IN AN AGEING IRELAND,
YOUTH FINANCIAL RESILIENCE
MATTERS EVEN MORE**

Around 631,400 people aged 16–24 live in the Republic of Ireland, accounting for 11.4% of the population.¹²

This generation is entering adulthood during one of the most significant demographic shifts in Ireland's history, with an ageing population and declining birth rates changing the balance of the country’s future workforce and putting more potential strain on the state.¹³ Ireland’s population has also become highly skilled, with the highest rate of third-level educational attainment in the EU.¹⁴

Young people’s opportunities to develop skills, find rewarding work and put their ambitions into practice therefore carry consequences for all of us. Ireland’s future stability and growth, and our competitive advantage internationally, will increasingly depend on their participation, productivity and prosperity.



^{12,13}CSO, Population Estimates (Persons in April), 2026.

¹⁴Business in Ireland 2025 – CSO; OECD Economic Survey: Ireland 2025.

→ FROM PASSIVE TO ACTIVE:
HOW YOUNG PEOPLE IN IRELAND ARE
DEALING WITH ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

A job, a place of your own, enough left over to plan ahead. These remain familiar ambitions, but earning a wage can leave young people some distance from achieving them. The financial playbook they have inherited comes with considerable uncertainty.

For those aged 16–24, the experiences of older peers paint tough odds. Figures by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, indicate that 44% of full-time workers aged 18–34 were living with their parents in 2024.¹⁵ Per the Central Statistics Office (CSO), only 13% of owner-occupied households were headed by 25–39 year-olds in 2022, down from 22% in 2011.¹⁶ These are sobering signals for anyone beginning to imagine their independent adult life.

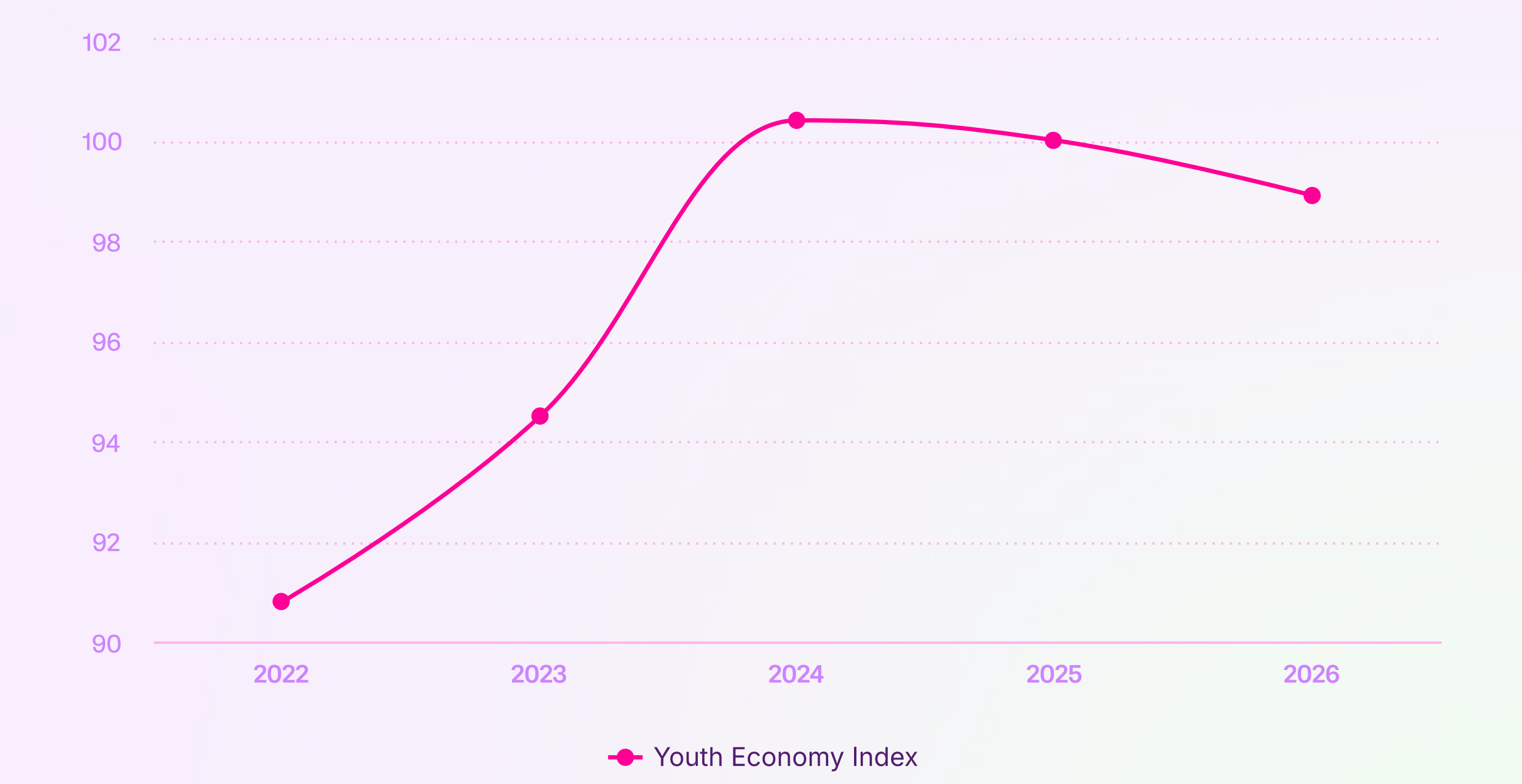
Some are looking overseas. In a 2025 National Youth Council of Ireland/RED C survey, three in five respondents aged 18–24 were considering moving abroad for a better quality of life.¹⁷

At the same time, the ways they manage money are expanding. AIB’s research has found young people navigating banking and fintech alongside opportunities in investing, resale, creator income and entrepreneurship.¹⁸ Education, employment, savings and homeownership now sit within a wider set of choices, requiring decisions about where money comes from, where it goes and whom to trust.

“Unlike previous generations, this generation is active with money. They’re not passive.”

— Stephen Kinsella
Professor of Economics

YOUTH ECONOMIC
WELLBEING INDEX



¹⁵Eurostat, dataset ilc_lvps09. Dataset covers ages 18–34; supplied 44% figure
¹⁶Central Statistics Office, “Private Households in Permanent Housing Units” (Table F2010), Census of Population 2022 – Profile 2: Housing in Ireland, updated 27 July 2023. Figures calculated from CSO data.
¹⁷NYCI/RED C, Cost of Living Impact Study 2025, p. 16.
¹⁸AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive.

According to Elke Hayes, a youth researcher at the University of Limerick, young people show a stronger appetite to understand money because their financial future feels less assured than it did for previous generations.¹⁹

With more routes open but fewer certainties ahead, young people are working out what financial progress looks like for them. That means weighing up opportunities, recognising risks and adapting as circumstances change.

→ **THE YOUTH ECONOMY IS BIGGER THAN SPENDING**

Young people’s economic contribution reaches well beyond what they buy. It includes the skills they develop, the income they create and the financial habits they bring into everyday life. This report explores that contribution through three connected dimensions.

Learning Power	Earning Power	Spending Power
The knowledge, skills and confidence to understand money, assess choices and navigate a complex financial world. Building the capability to make informed decisions as opportunities and circumstances change.	The routes through employment, entrepreneurship and side hustles that generate income, alongside investing and building wealth over time. Turning ambition into income and creating opportunities for themselves and others.	The everyday financial choices that influence markets, culture, technology adoption and consumer trends. Helping shape the products, services and experiences businesses offer.

To track how these three dimensions are moving together, AIB has developed a **Youth Economy Index**. The index tracks participation in education, training and/or work, how much young people earn and how much they spend. The ambition is to track the Youth Economy long term, reinforcing AIB’s commitment to understanding, and supporting, young people in Ireland.

Taking 2025 as a baseline score of 100, the index stands at **98.9 in 2026**, a small dip after strong gains that lifted it from 90.7 in 2022 to a peak of 100.2 in 2024.²⁰ The recent softening reflects more young people struggling to find work (youth unemployment stood at 12.4% in August 2026, more than three times the 3.9% rate for the wider workforce²¹) and higher prices slowing the growth in spending.²²

Together, these dimensions – learning, earning and spending power – show how young people are already contributing to Ireland’s economy, while building the foundations for their own futures.

¹⁹Elke Hayes, expert contribution.
²⁰AIB, The Youth Economy Index, 2026
^{21,22}CSO, Monthly Unemployment, August 2026.

A New FINANCIAL REALITY



Young people's realities are outpacing financial education, institutions and traditional life paths. They have more information, financial tools and routes to prosperity than ever, but also more decisions, complexity and uncertainty.

→ TODAY'S YOUTH DIDN'T INHERIT THE SAME FINANCIAL WORLD

Building a financial life now involves an increasing stream of ongoing decisions that barely featured in their parents' early adulthood. Which app should hold your savings? Can an online project become a reliable income? Whose advice can you trust?

Today's 16–24 year-olds have grown up with banking on their phones. AI, investing apps, crypto and Buy Now Pay Later have widened their choices and risks. Creator platforms and gig work have opened other ways to earn.²³ Each brings something new to understand, assess and manage.

Meanwhile, housing costs, inflation and global instability complicate plans for independence. These pressures overlap, making uncertainty a recurring feature of young adulthood.²⁴ Exploring new opportunities and worrying about the future can be part of the same day.

“Previous generations inherited a financial system they could largely participate in without actively questioning. Young people today need to understand the system because participation requires constant decision-making.”

— Stephen Kinsella

Financial capability needs to prepare young people for this reality. Knowing how a product works is one part of it. Knowing what questions to ask, where to find reliable guidance and when to change course matters too. Building security increasingly requires the confidence and skills to navigate ongoing change.

→ THEIR ECONOMIC PATH IS NO LONGER LINEAR

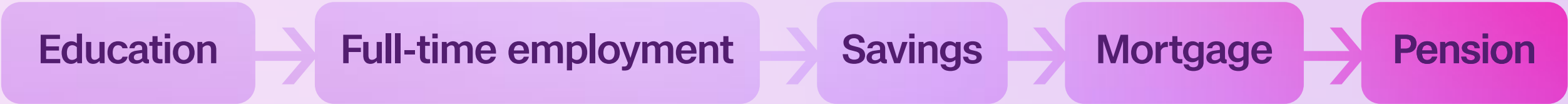
The traditional roadmap to adulthood has fragmented. Instead of the majority following one accepted route toward financial stability, a multi-route approach is becoming more of a norm for young people today.

Many are studying while working, travelling while upskilling, freelancing alongside a job or turning online selling into extra income.²⁵

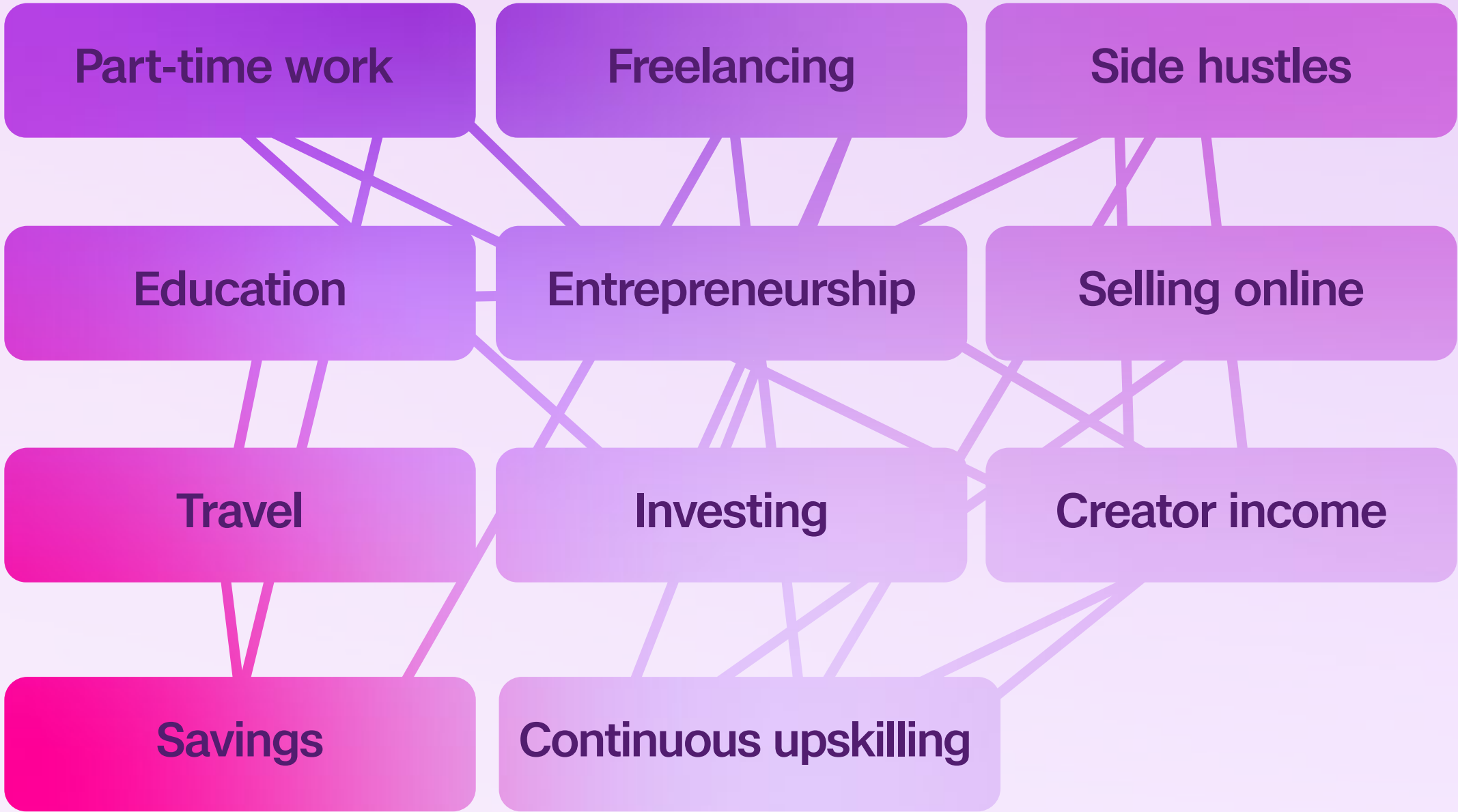
^{23,25}AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive

²⁴Background synthesis of Elke Hayes's contribution and supplied outline.

TRADITIONAL FINANCIAL JOURNEY



TODAY'S FINANCIAL JOURNEY





73%

use multiple financial providers.²⁹

34%

have two or more income sources.²⁷

25%

have at least one alternative income stream, including online selling, freelance work, creator income or gig work.²⁸

Professor Kinsella describes this as ‘building wealth horizontally’: developing opportunities alongside one another, with less reliance on a single career ladder.²⁶ One job may be part of the plan without being the plan for life. Young people are keeping other routes open, recognising that their work, income and ambitions may change.

That makes flexibility a financial skill. So is knowing when to make a change: to learn something new, to try a different income source or shift direction altogether. Constant adaptation is becoming a hallmark not just of economic participation, but of economic success.

“For me, financial success comes down to flexibility, the ability to choose how I spend my time rather than having that choice limited by my income.”

— Luke, 17

²⁶Stephen Kinsella, expert contribution.
²⁷⁻²⁹AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

→ **YOUNG PEOPLE BANK ON THEIR PHONES
– AND ACROSS PROVIDERS**

For young people, much of everyday money activity happens on a phone. AIB’s research places phones as the primary payment method across youth age groups, with cash playing a smaller role, even among under-18s.³⁰ More than two-thirds of 18–24 year-olds use fintech services.³¹ The appeal is practical: move money quickly, see where it goes and manage it with less effort, with instant transfers, bill splitting and savings tools cited as advantages over established banks.³²

That doesn’t mean young people are abandoning established institutions. They choose providers by the job they need done: one account receives their wages, another handles spending abroad, an app makes splitting a bill easier.³³ Irish banks retain a role in salary accounts, trust and longer-term financial plans, while fintech fits alongside for everyday spending and sending money between friends.³⁴

For providers, this raises the standard. Banking sits on the same screen as messaging, shopping and social apps, and young people bring those expectations with them: speed, clarity and services that fit their lives. Having an account is only part of the relationship. What matters is why a young person opens it, when they use it and what keeps it useful.

→ **AI IS SHIFTING
THEIR LABOUR MARKET**

Young people are preparing for jobs that will change as they do. AI is reshaping tasks, opening opportunities and raising new questions about which skills will hold their value.

The World Economic Forum forecasts strong growth in care, education and construction roles through 2030, while employers expect creative thinking to become increasingly important.³⁵

“Some companies are simply going to hire fewer people because they don’t need them as much but overall, the returns to creativity are going to explode.”

— Stephen Kinsella

For young people, this points towards opportunities built around human connection, practical judgement and the ability to imagine what comes next.

³⁰AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive.

^{31–33}Department of Finance/Ipsos B&A, Consumer Sentiment Banking Survey 2025, section 1.1 and pp. 30–31. Fintech usage among 18–24-year-olds: 69%. Advantages of fintech: base all fintech users, n=629.

³⁴AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

³⁵World Economic Forum, The Future of Jobs Report 2025, key findings. Global employer projections for 2025–2030; reflects several economic and demographic forces alongside AI.

→ **HOUSING:**
FROM MILESTONE TO MAYBE

Home ownership remains one of young people’s top ambitions – but no longer feels like an automatic outcome of working. In AIB’s research, only 38% of young people are prioritising home ownership within the next decade. Just 15% are actively saving for a deposit.³⁶

Even **among those who want to own,** the gap between ambition and action is clear.



For some, financial success now has to be measured outside of home ownership.

“My focus right now is just being able to have more disposable income while still being able to afford to rent – that would be financial success to me.”

— Alex, 24

Housing reaches into how young people save, plan and judge their progress. Homeownership can feel distant even when the desire is strong.

³⁶⁻³⁸ AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.
The 27% and 24% figures refer specifically to those who want to own a home.

→ **THIS GENERATION IS HOPEFUL
– BUT ALSO REALISTIC**

Many young people believe they can build a good financial future – but they’re less certain they can build it here.

The less young people believe Ireland offers that future, the more their sights turn abroad: 38% of those lacking confidence aspire to travel, versus 24% of those who feel confident – a 14-point gap.³⁹ It’s not evidence of an emigration intention, but a signal of what Ireland stands to lose if this gap remains.

Their outlook combines hope with a clear awareness of the obstacles ahead. Giving them reasons to see their future in Ireland means making opportunity feel within reach. It also means helping them prepare. More financial choices bring more to understand, assess and question.

The first pillar of the Youth Economy is **Learning Power:** where young people turn for guidance, whom they trust and what helps them build the knowledge and confidence to act.

42%

believe Ireland offers a place to build a good financial future.⁴¹

68%

are hopeful about their own financial future.⁴⁰

^{39–41}AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

Learning: BUILDING FINANCIAL CAPABILITY

Kaydi Rowe
→ Barista

→ FINANCIAL EDUCATION
HAPPENS IN THEIR FEEDS

A game, a creator’s video, a question put to AI. Young people encounter ideas about money long before a formal lesson, and any money question can now get an answer in seconds. Knowing whether to trust it takes more work.

“The first place many young people likely come across the concept of an ‘economy’ is Minecraft.”

— Elke Hayes

34%

of post-primary students surveyed learn about money through social media.⁴⁴

48%

of young people are ‘informal-only’ financial learners, using sources outside school, banks and traditional news.⁴³

83%

of internet users aged 16–29 engage in online learning, the highest participation of any age group.⁴²

Kaydi Rowe
→Barista

⁴²CSO, Household Digital Consumer Behaviour 2025, Table 6.2.
⁴³AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.
⁴⁴MABS, Money Matters Survey, reported by the CCPC, 11 March 2026. Reports 34% of post-primary students.

Their learning stretches beyond structured courses into videos, apps, tutorials and social feeds they dip into when they need an answer. TikTok leads among social platforms, used by 72% of those learning about money through social media.⁴⁵

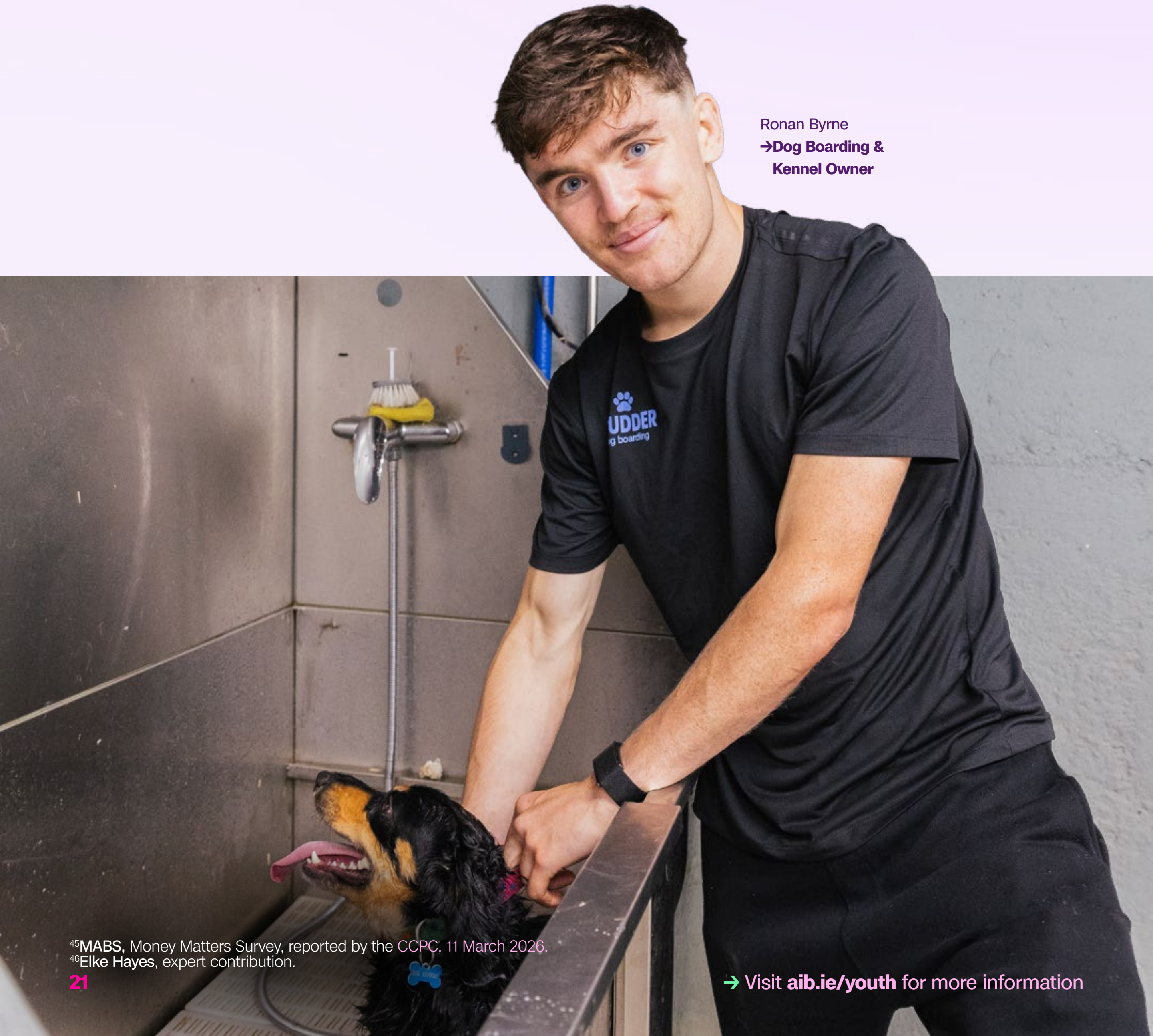
Yet access to information can leave practical questions unanswered.

“I wish we were taught more about everyday money, like how bank accounts actually work, how to budget your wages, taxes, saving, and what happens when you start earning properly.”

— Kaydi, 16

Advice about money, careers and starting a business arrives in the same feed, often with little to distinguish expertise from opinion or advertising. AI adds another layer. It can explain unfamiliar concepts, help research products or turn a business idea into a working website, but it can also produce convincing errors and give misleading advice.

That creates a demanding task. Young people must judge what evidence supports a claim and whether the person advising benefits from their next move. A confident delivery or a large following can make an answer persuasive without making it reliable. Financial literacy isn’t just about understanding current accounts and pensions, it now includes navigating financial information, checking its source and questioning its claims.⁴⁶



Ronan Byrne
→Dog Boarding & Kennel Owner

⁴⁵MABS, Money Matters Survey, reported by the CCPC, 11 March 2026.

⁴⁶Elke Hayes, expert contribution.

→ **PARENTS ARE STILL
THE MOST TRUSTED TEACHERS**

Despite the rise of digital learning, parents remain the single biggest influence on young people’s financial behaviours. In AIB’s research, 60% of young people name parents or family as a source of financial learning.⁴⁷ Their influence stretches beyond opening a first account to building saving habits, managing a budget and understanding financial products. Advice often continues into young adulthood, alongside financial support.⁴⁸

These everyday conversations can give young people a foundation of confidence – but this kind of knowledge-sharing isn’t universal or always comprehensive. To this end, schools have an important role in making practical financial learning more widely available.

AIB Future Sparks provide curriculum-linked resources covering financial education, careers, wellbeing and practical life skills for students from First Year to Leaving Certificate.

**18%
GROWTH IN
REGISTRATION**

with AIB Future Sparks
from May 2022 to May 2026.⁴⁹

**96%
REACH**

within the Irish post-primary market
as of May 2026.⁵⁰



Kessiena Unuakpor
→Dancer

That reach creates an opportunity to give more young people a shared foundation. Financial capability needs to be treated as a life skill, introduced early and accessible to everyone.

⁴⁷AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.
⁴⁸AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive.
^{49–50}Real Nation, AIB Future Sparks programme data.

→ **CONFIDENCE AND
KNOWLEDGE GO HAND IN HAND**

Financial confidence is related to financial knowledge. AIB's research shows that confident young people are more likely to save, invest and feel hopeful about the future⁵¹ (Section 10).

Learning Power exists to build that knowledge, so young people can make informed decisions and take their next step with confidence.

Jonathan Lane & Luke Carroll
→ Accessible Education



⁵¹AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

Earning: AMBITION INTO OPPORTUNITY

→ **AMBITION IS HIGH**
– ACCESS IS THE CHALLENGE

“Young people increasingly want to build businesses rather than simply join businesses. Their primary characteristic is an overabundance of ambition and an under abundance of money.”

— Stephen Kinsella

Digital tools are making that ambition feel closer. In AIB’s research, 68% show entrepreneurial intent: they run a business, have a side hustle, plan to start one or want to, even if it feels beyond reach.⁵²

The largest group sits at that last stage. **35% want to start a business but believe it is currently unrealistic.**⁵³ There is an appetite to act, but with a substantial gap between the idea and a possible first step.

That gap is more pronounced among young women.

Oran Aurelio
→Fashion Designer

40% of women

Say starting a business feels out of reach.⁵⁶

29% of men

Say starting a business feels out of reach.⁵⁵

Access to capital and networks are the main constraints on young people’s entrepreneurial ambitions.⁵⁴ Funding matters, alongside where to begin and how to test an idea.

Supporting this ambition is important. Practical guidance, connections and access to finance can help young people judge what is possible and take an informed first step.

^{52-53, 55-56} AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.
⁵⁴ Stephen Kinsella, expert contribution.

→ THE RISE OF THE SIDE HUSTLE

A job is no longer the only source of income.⁵⁷ Young people are bringing together different ways to earn, from wages and freelance projects to selling on online marketplaces such as Vinted. Growing up with examples of people making money online has widened what this generation believes is possible.⁵⁸

25%

have an alternative income stream through online selling, freelance work, creator income or gig work.⁶⁰

34%

have two or more income sources.⁵⁹

“Social media has...made things like selling clothes online, creating content or having a side job seem much more normal. I think people my age are more open to having different ways of making money.”

— Kaydi, 16

Online selling reinforces this shift. Among internet users aged 16–29, participation rose from 16% to 27% in a year, the largest percentage-point increase of any age group.⁶¹ Resale, creative work and small businesses offer ways to test an idea or supplement wages.

For some, the appeal also reflects doubts about conventional employment.

“People are kinda seeing it as ‘Okay, well, it’s pretty difficult to get a sustainable long-term job that pays well and isn’t, like, a bad job. So I’d be better off just doing my own thing.’”

— Fionnán, 18

Financial tools need to fit this mix: tracking money from different sources, helping people budget around uneven payments and plan beyond the next payday.

^{57, 59–60}AIB, Youth Economy Decoded, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.
⁵⁸Youth Testimonial, Kaydi, 16.
⁶¹CSO, Household Digital Consumer Behaviour 2025, Table 2.1.

→ **FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE
COMES IN STAGES, NOT LEAPS**

Financial decisions start well before a first full-time salary. By their late teens and early twenties, young people are choosing providers, managing budgets and exploring savings, investments and credit, including Buy Now Pay Later.⁶² Everyday spending sits alongside questions about long-term security.

Their priorities develop as income and personal responsibilities grow.

“I get compound interest and understand that the earlier you start investing the better. If I can get that up and running, I suppose that will give me a bit of security that I have some money in the bank for my future if something goes wrong.”

— Fionnán, 18

	16–18	19–21	22–24
INCOME	Family, allowances and occasional work	Part-time work alongside education; more regular, but can fluctuate	A main salary account is established
EVERYDAY FINANCE	First bank account and everyday digital payments; parents remain the primary guide	First wages and independent spending	Rent, commuting and bills take a larger share of income
LOOKING AHEAD	Saving for experiences	Beginning longer-term savings	Desire for a car and home ownership

Age-stage snapshot: indicative experiences, not a fixed timetable.⁶⁵

Those responsibilities can arrive while earnings are still modest. CSO data shows substantially lower weekly earnings among 15–24-year-olds than among workers in their later twenties or the workforce overall.⁶³ Getting started also presents challenges. In IrishJobs’ spring 2026 research, 47% of employers reported reducing entry-level roles, against a backdrop of rising labour costs and increased AI adoption.⁶⁴

Leaving education is therefore a crucial moment for support. Young people need to understand their payslip, plan around essential costs and manage gaps between payments. Independence builds decision by decision: a young person can manage their own spending while sometimes relying on family support, or start saving before earning a regular wage.

^{62,65}AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive. Findings
⁶³CSO, Earnings Analysis Using Administrative Data Sources 2024, Age, Tables 4.1–4.2. Weekly earnings by employment; differences between age groups do not track individual earnings progression or adjust for hours worked.
⁶⁴IrishJobs, Hiring Trends Update, Spring/Summer 2026.

→ AMBITIONS MOVE FASTER THAN PORTFOLIOS

Investing and pensions increasingly factor into how young people picture long-term security, even before they have portfolios.

Despite current ownership being modest, with only 5% owning a pension account, interest in having a pension is nearly twice as great, at 9.5%.⁶⁶ Crypto and stock investments trend similarly, with 9% of young people investing vs 19% wanting to.⁶⁷

These findings point to an appetite for financial planning before many young people have the means or confidence to act. They also reflect a broader ambition to build wealth through a combination of work, saving, investing and enterprise.

Ireland has long been known as a nation of savers. However, when it comes to investing, Ireland ranks well below international norms.⁶⁸ The Government's new Personal Investment Account initiative is being designed to help change that. Having seen similar schemes help transform investment participation rates in other countries, Ireland has a huge opportunity to create a new generation of investors, including younger investors.

Earning Power begins with bringing money in. It develops through learning how to use that income to build lasting security. Support should make the years ahead easier to plan for, alongside the month ahead.

⁶⁶⁻⁶⁷AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

⁶⁸Central Bank of Ireland, 2025 research + 2026 analysis, December 2025.



Spending: How the **YOUTH ECONOMY** MOVES MONEY



→ **YOUTH SPENDING**
IS DIGITAL-FIRST, SOCIAL-FIRST

Money is no longer something young people carry – it’s something they move instantly between people and platforms to shape their experiences, from splitting dinner to putting money aside for a weekend away.

AIB’s research places phones as the primary payment method across every youth age group. Young people rarely carry cash or a physical wallet.⁶⁹

97%

of internet users aged 16–29 use internet or mobile banking.⁷¹

Kessiena Unuakpor
→ **Dancer**



These habits make spending a shared experience. One person can book, others can transfer their share and a group can save towards a trip or event.⁷⁰ Payments sit within the social routine, alongside the messages and decisions that bring people together.

Spending Power starts here: with everyday choices made through a phone, often involving other people. Speed and convenience help those plans happen. Financial tools earn their place by making the money part easy to manage.

→ **YOUNG PEOPLE BUDGET**
IN SAVINGS POTS & APPS

Young people are giving their money a purpose before they spend it to stay in control. A holiday pot. A car fund. Money set aside for bills. AIB’s research shows them separating balances to make everyday spending and future plans easier to manage.⁷²

Automatic transfers help turn those intentions into habits. Moving savings 'out of sight' after payday draws a boundary around what is available to spend.⁷³ Budgeting becomes part of the routine, visible in an app and updated as money moves.

There is a social side too. ‘Loud budgeting’ describes being open about spending limits and explaining financial choices to others.⁷⁴

Together, these behaviours put organisation at the centre of money management. Choosing a product is one decision, while creating a system that works each payday is an ongoing practice.

⁶⁹⁻⁷⁰ AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive.
⁷¹ CSO, Household Digital Consumer Behaviour 2025, Table 2.1. Population covers people aged 16–29 who used the internet in the previous three months; the banking measure includes mobile banking and payment services.
⁷²⁻⁷³ AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive.
⁷⁴ “Loud budgeting” cultural reference (https://www.tiktok.com/@young.irish.budget)

→ ENJOY TODAY AND BUILD FOR TOMORROW

Young people aren't choosing between living now and saving later – they're trying to do both.

Young people spend generously on experiences, but they aren't completely abandoning long-term financial goals. They want to both enjoy today and build security for tomorrow.

Meals out, nights out and getting home afterwards take a larger share of their spending. AIB transaction data shows 18–24 year-olds allocate more to fast food, restaurants, pubs, nightlife and taxis than the national average.⁷⁵

Saving sits alongside that spending. **36% have at least €1,000 saved, including 19% with €5,000 or more.**⁷⁶ Young people are often characterised as impulsive spenders, but this research reveals a generation that manages to balance spending and saving.

Travel is a clear example: over a third of young people say travelling or living abroad is one of the things that matters most to them over the next decade, right alongside more traditional milestones like owning a home.⁷⁷

A holiday fund and a house deposit sit on different timelines, but both involve planning. Spending on experiences often co-exists with saving habits, even while longer-term goals are taking shape.



⁷⁵AIB transaction data.

⁷⁶⁻⁷⁷AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026

→ **WHERE SPENDING BEHAVIOURS
AND YOUTH VALUES INTERSECT**

Young people’s values are expressed in what they buy, from choosing second-hand clothes to checking a product’s origins or supporting an ethical brand. Sustainability may sit alongside other priorities, but these everyday decisions show how spending reflects what matters to them.



Re-selling combines spending and earning. Young people who sell online are more likely to buy second-hand,⁸⁰ and Vinted and Depop make it easy to switch between the two. On a tight budget, buying used stretches money, while selling recovers value and gives items another life, so saving money and consuming consciously go hand in hand. Price, style and environmental concerns all play a part.

This is **Spending Power** in practice: young people’s choices shape which businesses succeed and how goods circulate. That power continues after the purchase, in what they keep, reuse and pass on, so spending reflects their identity as much as their purchasing power.

⁷⁸⁻⁸⁰AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

→ **SPENDING DOESN'T EQUAL
CONFIDENCE**

Digital spending is frictionless, but young people remain cautious about debt and are conscious of financial pressure. AIB’s research finds reservations about traditional credit cards, with borrowing often linked to a clear purpose such as education or a car.⁸¹ Easy payments can co-exist with careful thinking about what is owed.

56%

feel pressure to look like they are doing well, even when they cannot afford it.⁸³

47%

spend everything they earn, or more, in a typical month.⁸²



Layne Whelan
→Artist



These pressures play out in feeds filled with friends’ holidays, fashion, nights out and milestones. Spending can become part of keeping up socially, while ‘**treat yourself**’ messages offer an immediate reward. The social media platforms that help young people learn about money also serve them lifestyles that they often measure themselves against.

In a culture of constant comparison and instant purchasing, building confidence means helping young people recognise those pressures and make decisions on their own terms.

⁸¹AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive.
^{82–83}AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

Financial Confidence: A FOUNDATION FOR RESILIENCE

→ **RESILIENCE IS RELATED TO CONFIDENCE**

AIB's research found that young people who feel more financially confident also tend to feel more in control of their financial future, and are more likely to save, invest and feel hopeful.⁸⁴

● High Confidence ● Low Confidence

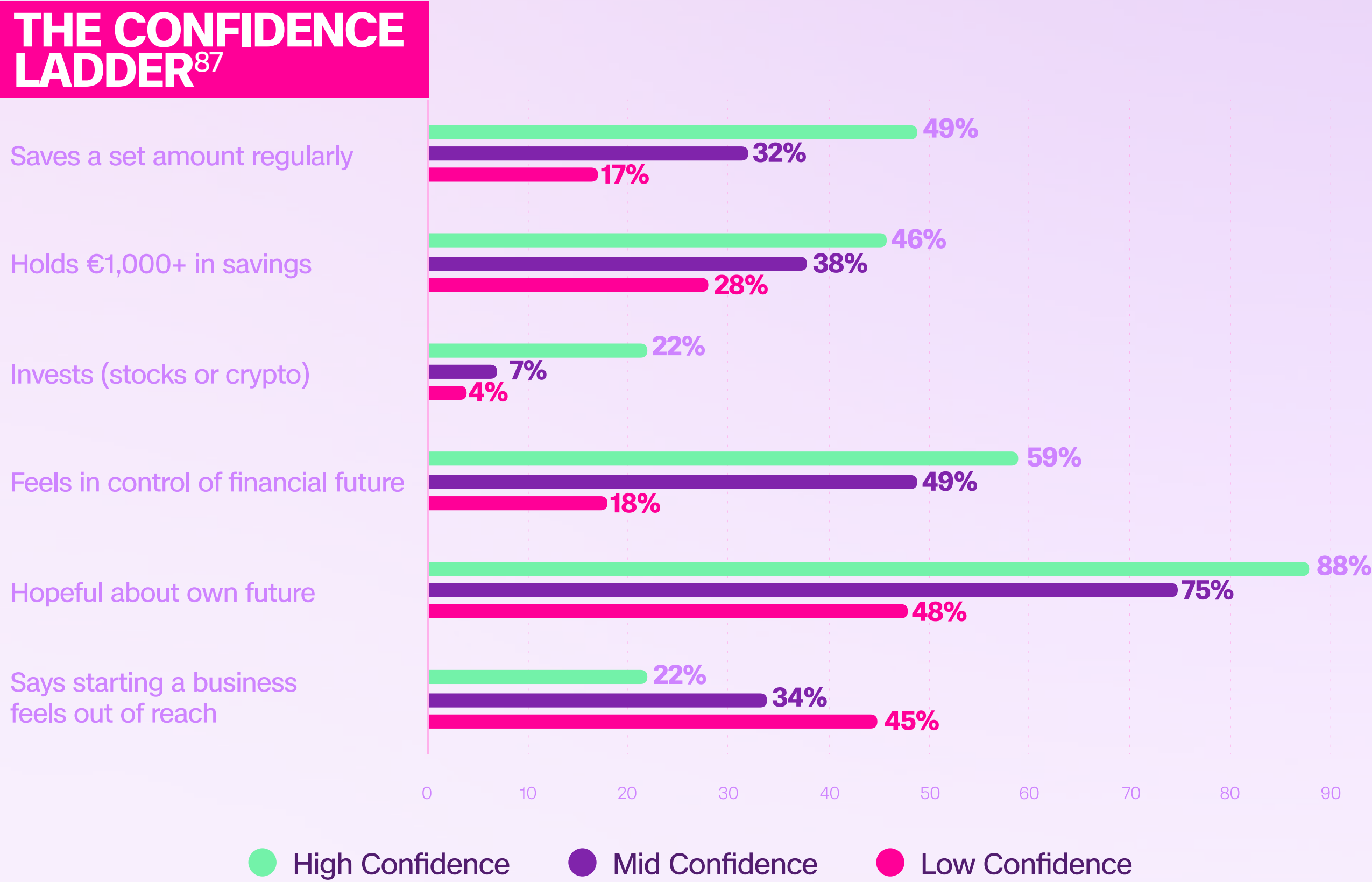


Source: AIB Youth Economy Decoded, August 2026. Highest and lowest confidence are the top and bottom thirds of respondents on a combined score across six areas of money management. Figures show association, not cause.⁸⁵

⁸⁴⁻⁸⁵ AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.

The differences are substantial. **Young people with the highest confidence are nearly three times as likely to save regularly and more than five times as likely to invest, and much more likely to feel hopeful.**⁸⁶ These findings link confidence with both everyday habits and longer-term outlook, and point to the value in supports that help young people put financial knowledge into practice.

One opportunity is to build a **confidence ladder:** learning that supports saving, habits that strengthen a sense of control and progress that gives young people reason to feel hopeful. Confidence and resilience can then reinforce each other at every step.



→ **THE CONFIDENCE GAP**

Confidence is not evenly distributed. Some young people enter adulthood with significantly less confidence despite having similar ambitions. AIB’s research reveals differences across gender, life stage and location, showing where young people may need more support.⁸⁸

WHERE GAPS APPEAR	WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS
GENDER	Young women report similar incomes to young men, but are less likely to save regularly and less confident about investing.
LIFE STAGE	Those who have left education are more likely to worry about money, struggle financially and feel less hopeful.
PLACE	Confidence that Ireland offers a good financial future is lower in rural areas and in Connacht/Ulster than in Dublin.

Source: AIB Youth Economy Decoded, August 2026.⁸⁹

^{86,88-89}AIB, Youth Economy Decoded Survey, Ipsos B&A, August 2026.
Differences between education-status groups do not establish an individual confidence drop after leaving education.
⁸⁷Same research. Note: associations do not establish causation or a proven sequence from learning to resilience.

BUILDING A CONFIDENT FUTURE



→ THE YOUTH ECONOMY NEEDS NEW INFRASTRUCTURE

How do we build the most financially confident generation?

Young people’s financial lives have moved faster than the systems built to support them. They organise their money, learn beyond established institutions and explore new ways to earn, often piecing together guidance, income and services themselves.

Confidence is closely linked to the habits and outlook that support resilience.⁹⁰ AIB’s research points to demand for practical guidance, real-life money education, reliable digital tools and help as new responsibilities arrive.⁹¹ Schools, employers, communities and financial institutions reach young people at different moments, and each can meet part of that need.

WHO	WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE NEED	WHERE THEY CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE
EDUCATION	Real-life education	Embed practical financial learning at key stages, giving young people opportunities to practise budgeting, compare options and work through real decisions before responsibilities arrive.
EMPLOYERS	Support at milestones	Support financial wellbeing from the first job, helping young people understand their pay, manage new commitments and begin planning for the longer term.
COMMUNITIES	Practical guidance	Widen access to trusted guidance and mentoring, connecting young people with the knowledge, networks and opportunities to explore entrepreneurship.
FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS	Trusted digital tools	Design tools that teach as well as transact, making money easier to organise and decisions easier to understand, with clear guidance where young people already learn and manage money.

The aim should be continuity: lessons that carry into a first job, guidance that develops as responsibilities grow and help that remains accessible as plans change. Building the most financially confident generation doesn’t just relate to one sector – it’s a national imperative.

→ EMPOWERING IRELAND’S MOST CONFIDENT GENERATION

At AIB, our role is to help young people navigate a changing financial world with confidence.

This report began with listening. We’ll continue to listen as young people’s lives, ambitions and needs evolve, with a commitment to supporting their financial confidence over the long term.

The Youth Economy is one of Ireland’s greatest opportunities. Through how they learn, earn and spend, this ambitious and adaptable generation is already changing the country’s economy.

The opportunity now is to build an Ireland where every young person has the confidence, capability and support to participate fully, pursue their ambitions and help shape Ireland’s shared prosperity.

⁹⁰Synthesis of AIB, Youth Economy Decoded, Ipsos B&A, August 2026 and Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive.
⁹¹AIB, Changing Nature of Banking Research: 16–24 Deep Dive.

“Young people in Ireland have had to build resilience in the face of many challenges. Despite those challenges, the next generation is remarkably ambitious. Young people haven’t inherited the same financial playbook their parents did. They’ve inherited a world with more financial decisions and more uncertainty. However, they are already shaping the economy through how they learn, earn, spend, save, build businesses and adopt new financial technologies.

AIB recognises the importance of our role supporting their ability to participate in and contribute to Ireland’s economy.”

— David McNamara
AIB Chief Economist



Kaydi Rowe
→ Barista

Methodology

APPENDIX



Jonathan Lane & Luke Carroll
→ Accessible Education

The Youth Economy Decoded brings together commissioned survey research, AIB customer transaction analysis, published data and qualitative insights. These sources explore how young people in Ireland learn about money, earn, spend and build financial confidence.

→ **Primary research**

AIB Youth Economy Decoded, The Youth Lab, THINKHOUSE & Ipsos B&A, 2026

The report’s principal research is a **nationally representative survey of 437 young people aged 16–24 across the Republic of Ireland**, commissioned by AIB and conducted by Ipsos B&A. Fieldwork took place from 21 August to 1 September 2026, exploring financial attitudes, behaviours, ambitions and confidence.

AIB Changing Nature of Banking Research, Ipsos B&A, November 2024

The 16–24 Deep Dive provides insights from AIB’s internal research into young people’s digital banking behaviours, money management and changing needs at different life stages.

AIB proprietary transaction and valuation analysis

Aggregated, anonymised AIB transaction data provides a view of spending among customers aged 18–24, comparing spending categories against a national-average benchmark. This analysis reflects activity captured within AIB’s customer data.

AIB Future Sparks programme data, supplied by Real Nation

Programme participation, usage and evaluation data from AIB Future Sparks provide additional context on financial education, youth engagement and practical skills development in Irish post-primary schools.

AIB, The Youth Economy Index, 2026

See [methodology details below](#)

The Youth Economy Index provides a composite measure of economic conditions for the 16-to-24-year age group. This index combines three sub-categories across learning, earning and spending in the Youth Economy.

→ **Qualitative research**

THINKHOUSE’s department The Youth Lab led the cultural analysis to explore the wider behaviours and influences shaping young people’s financial lives. Expert interviews and youth voices add professional perspectives and lived experience.

Contributors include:

→ **Dr. Stephen Kinsella, Professor of Economics, University of Limerick.**

→ **Elke Hayes, Youth Researcher, University of Limerick.**

→ **Youth interviewees: Alex, 24; Kaydi, 16; Fionnán, 18; Luke, 17.**

Qualitative contributions provide context and individual perspectives; they should not be read as representative measures of all young people.

→ Interpreting the Survey Findings

The principal survey covers 16–24-year-olds in the Republic of Ireland. Other sources use different age ranges, populations and reporting periods, so findings should be read within their stated scope.

Survey responses describe reported attitudes and behaviours, while transaction analysis captures recorded spending activity. Associations between confidence, saving, investing and financial outlook do not, on their own, establish cause and effect. Differences between age or life-stage groups do not necessarily show how an individual’s circumstances change over time.

Financial confidence is measured as a combined score across six areas: budgeting, saving, investing, tax and payslips, pensions and getting a mortgage.

→The Youth Economy Index

The 16–24 population is growing, up 2.2% to 631,400 in 2026 and projected to reach around 675,000 by the early 2030s, a stronger trajectory than most European countries, where the youth population is declining.

INDEX (2025=100)	2022	2023	2024	2025 (BASE YEAR)	2026
LEARNING: NEET RATE	93.8	98.4	109.4	100.0	90.6 ^e
EARNING: MEDIAN WEEKLY EARNINGS	89.9	92.5	96.0	100.0	104.0 ^e
SPENDING: AIB CARD SPEND	88.7	92.7	95.8	100.0	102.1
OVERALL YOUTH ECONOMY INDEX	90.8	94.5	100.4	100.0	98.9

"e" = AIB Estimate.

Methodology explained: The Youth Economy Index is a composite of three equally weighted series covering **Learning, Earning and Spending** from 2022 to 2026. To enable a comparison over time, each series is indexed, with a base year of 2025. These are: Learning: young persons (15–24 years) neither in employment nor in education and training (NEET). Source: Eurostat. Earning: median weekly earnings for 15–24 year olds. Source: CSO Earnings Analysis using Administrative Data Sources. Spending: annual card spend data for 16–24 year olds, adjusted for CPI inflation. Sources: AIB, CSO.

→ Third-party research and data

Published research, official statistics and industry analysis provide wider economic, social and cultural context. Sources include:

Central Statistics Office (CSO): Population Estimates (Persons in April), 2026; Household Digital Consumer Behaviour, 2025; and Earnings Analysis Using Administrative Data Sources, 2024.

Department of Finance / Ipsos B&A: Consumer Sentiment Banking Survey, 2025.

Competition and Consumer Protection Commission (CCPC): research and supporting material referenced in the report.

Eurostat: data accessed through the Eurostat Data Browser.

National Youth Council of Ireland / RED C: Cost of Living Impact Study 2025.

Central Bank of Ireland: Irish households are not realising the full benefit of investment options, December 2025.

Photography by youth photographer Arann McCormack.

Allied Irish Banks, p.l.c.
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